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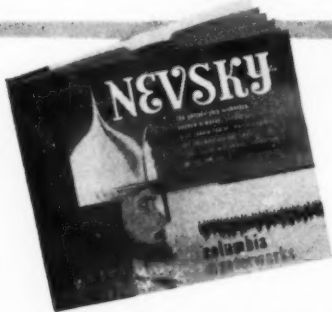
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The American RECORD GUIDE

formerly THE AMERICAN MUSIC LOVER



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Editorial Notes

Last month's editorial brought forth some interesting correspondence. The letters of agreement or praise need not concern us; let us examine rather one or two letters from old readers who refuse to admit any "charitable feelings" toward the record companies, and more especially a letter from a long friendly Boston reader who reads a completely different meaning than was intended in some points of our editorial. He writes: "I have not one grain of sympathy for the record companies, nor do I know any other buyer of good records who has. . . I think they should have stood up to Petrillo and fought. . . the record business is one of the most mismanaged things in this extraordinary country. . . the phonograph should not confine itself to perpetuating the artistic work of any one decade: it should perpetuate, and keep available, the artistic work of every decade. . . the function of the phonograph is to make available the *best* artistic work of *all* the artists who have flourished since adequate recording began. What I am pleading for now is what I, and others, have always pleaded for: a *sense of proportion*. Let us have everything, if there is time and space, but let us have everything *in proportion*; and when we run up against limitations, let us *put first things first*."

It should be observed at this point that no business in this land of ours looks for sympathy, for it rightfully expects thinking people to comprehend—at least in part—the problems with which it copes. Almost every big business can be termed mismanaged by people on the outside. It has always been our contention that the record business has concentrated on the artist to the detriment of the music. But the record business, if we analyze it honestly, is selling two sepa-

rate things—artistry and music. And music means nothing without the artist. One recalls Stefan Zweig's "adept" remark: "It is only through the self-portraiture of great artists that the genius of mankind becomes comprehensible to earthbound mortals."

With my correspondent's contention that the phonograph should "perpetuate, and keep available, the artistic work of every decade" we are in full agreement. But the fact that the great recordings of another decade are no longer available in the current catalogues of the companies has its parallel in other spheres. The great books of other decades are consistently excised from catalogues. However, many great literary works are republished in cheap or popular editions, and most of the great literature of all times is still available in some form or another. It seems to us that the record companies could take a cue from the book business and permit famous recordings of the past to be reissued in popular editions. Some of the small independent companies might find this a lucrative business, but whether the arrangements could be made with the big companies is a moot question.

Ever since the inception of this magazine, we have pleaded for a *sense of proportion*, and there are those who give us credit for consistent crusading for greater appreciation of musical and artistic values. It is so easy to damn what displeases. It is much harder to survey objectively the values in art which we instinctively dislike. My correspondent says in this connection, "There are such things as *standards and values*, and in every case *somebody* is *right*, and the rest are *wrong*." Right and wrong are subject to varying interpretations, and there have always been widely divergent views on what is right and what is wrong. Every writer on art has his own standards, but how widely divergent are the criterions of taste. One man dislikes Brahms, another Debussy. One extols Mozart above Beethoven. One man dislikes Melba and Caruso, another Maggie Teyte and Gigli. One man dislikes Horowitz and Szigeti, another Schnabel and Heifetz. We could go on *ad infinitum*. That there are values in the artistry of the various personalities named has been proved, but not conclusively to everyman's taste.

My correspondent goes on to say. "If a buyer of good records is worthy of his name,

he is not interested just in buying the snippets that some of the pitiful little performers of today are putting on records. He is interested in building up a representative collection of the best work of all the artists who have recorded in the past forty years." We, along with many others, regret that many of the fine recordings of the past forty years are no longer available to the public, except through channels which place prohibitive prices on them. There have always been second-rate recordings—in every decade we will find the catalogues of the companies filled with these. There have always been lesser artists. But many of them have given us cause to rejoice that they existed. It is interesting to find that the second-rate is frequently extolled when it is no longer available. The people who sell old records today are getting fantastic prices for the discs of many second-rate artists. And collectors today have made celebrities out of a lot of artists who in their day were not first-rate performers.

There is a tendency today to pick on the lesser artists of our time. Because of the radio and the moving picture, many of these have acquired a greater following than they would have had in the old days. There is a lamentable, but none the less widespread attitude among record buyers today that fine recording is preferable to fine artistry. Where the phonograph is concerned the execution of music is bound up with the reality of performance, and the latter in itself is an art contributing to art. While conceding that the recordings of a great artist of the past are preferable from the standpoint of that artist, many people resent the muffled tone or blurred background sounds that emanate from acoustic recordings. Because of this, the companies undertook to re-record some recordings of Caruso and other celebrities. While this procedure was not as perfectly realized as it might have been in some cases, it did have results. And it is our belief that the companies could pursue this policy to great advantage if the time and effort would be given to it.

We may decry conditions in this country today, as our correspondent does at the end of his letter, but we hardly think that he or anyone else should level his gunfire at the record companies alone. We do not condone

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BUYING A PHONOGRAPH

What To Look For in a Good Machine

By John M. Rayner

Buying a new phonograph or combination these days is a knotty operation even to the most experienced. The market is filled with instruments of different types, quality and make. One does not know just where to begin. So many people, not qualified to manufacture reproducing equipment, are in the business today, and all sorts of machines are on the market. There are nursery machines, acoustical and electrical; portable machines galore, both types; table model combinations with "untouched by human hands" devices for playing records; and large radio-phonographs that incorporate, if one believes all the claims in the ads, every wonder of post-war electronics.

Unfortunately for those with slim pocket-books, many of the portable phonographs are completely unsatisfactory for the proper reproduction of records. These contrivances are more often than not equipped with 2-tube amplifiers that, technically, must be a poor compromise at their best; cheap motors that vary noticeably in speed between the outside and inside of a record (with resultant alterations in pitch); and poorly designed pickups that will ruin records in no time at all (particularly when played with

metal or jewel needles of the semi-permanent type). Most of this sort of equipment is being installed in cardboard-thin, cheap leatherette carrying cases, and what is more, these machines are far too expensively priced.

There is one point that should be brought out: the majority of commercial phonographs or combinations are not "high-fidelity" instruments. The manufacturers cater to the average listener, one who tends to like plenty of bass and over-all so-called "mellow tone", and one who dislikes any semblance of scratch and brilliance in quality. The listener cannot always be blamed for choosing this type of machine, because if any semblance of better quality has come along it has generally been poorly presented to him. The average radio demonstrator in the stores does not take the trouble to expound upon tonal virtues, he sells the instruments and is more concerned with making a sale than with musical qualities. In fact, most phonograph salesmen have about as much music in them as the cabinet of the machine they are demonstrating.

The fact that commercial machines do not lean towards high fidelity need not, however,

discourage the prospective buyer. An instrument can have an excellent over-all quality without having a wide range. A sensitive ear will put up with, and find satisfactory, good, well-balanced medium-range quality as well as wide-range quality. I suggest that a prospective buyer take along an interested friend, a technically-minded person if he can find one, when he goes out to buy a new phonograph. Four ears are always better than two even if the other person is only another music lover. Also, the buyer should bear in mind that he is purchasing an instrument that is intended to give him pleasure and satisfaction primarily through his sense of hearing, not some other sense. True, he should consider the quality and workmanship of construction, but these should not be allowed to overshadow the primary consideration—quality pleasing to the ears. It is well to remember that attractive gadgets, which operate easily, generally have nothing to do with the reproduction of sound.

The buyer must be also prepared to make certain compromises; he may find, for example, that the instrument he likes best does not have both treble and bass controls, or that the pickup has a so-called permanent-point. In such a situation, he must analyze the problem carefully and be willing to make the compromise.

Select Carefully

When he enters a store it is well not to jump at a phonograph or combination immediately. Further, he should not permit himself to be talked into some "Electronics gift to humanity" which occupies a central flood-lit position in the store. He should study what is available and pick out a number of instruments that seem inviting or interesting, or meet whatever requirements he has in mind. The process of elimination is the best course, as one does not know what to believe in this era of extravagant advertising and poor instruments.

After the machines have been chosen for one reason or another (and let's hope not for the sake of appearance alone), ask to hear each one in turn using the same record. The reason for using the same record is to have a comparative check-up on all the machines under examination. In this way, it is the quality of the instruments—one against

the other—that is tested. A warning—one or two larger manufacturers have special test recordings, often pressed on vinylite material, which show off the manufacturer's products in a better light than they would have under ordinary performing conditions, particularly with respect to scratch. This is not fair, because the majority of records are of the shellac type and consequently have some surface sound. Do not be taken in by this type of disc; you want commercial records, with which you will be living, to test your new machine. Perhaps the best way to test a new machine is to bring along several of your own records of different makes—records with which have presented difficulties on your old machine. Try these out and try some new ones.

A Good Test Record

As a test record, I would suggest Columbia's recent recording of the *Zampa Overture* (No. 12270-D). This is very fine for test purposes as it runs a wide dynamic range and exhibits prominently instruments that are difficult to reproduce well—the triangle and the horns. The triangle will provide an idea of frequency response. The horns will give an idea of the quality of the pickup, since they cause a poor pickup to buzz or rattle. (In this connection, an even better test can be made by trying several sides from Columbia's recording of Mahler's *Fourth Symphony*—set 589, in which the horns have been known to present some problems in reproduction with quite a few readers). Do not be afraid to experiment with the volume and tone controls if the quality does not seem satisfactory at first. It is very doubtful that you will find tone controls set at one point sufficing for the best reproduction of all the records in your collection; certainly never with the volume control at the same level. In this first testing, let your ears be your sole judge and choose the one or two instruments that are most satisfying from this standpoint.

Now, for some really critical listening—on the *Zampa Overture* disc, first side, about one-half inch in, there is a triangle playing with the full orchestra. If the triangle can be clearly heard, above the rest of the orchestra, the prospective buyer has found a machine that approaches high fidelity or is a high fidelity unit. If the triangle cannot be

heard but the full orchestra is nevertheless reasonably clear and clean, and not a conglomeration of sound, this means the machine is good but has only a medium frequency-response range. The reason for this is that the tone of the triangle has a very high vibration rate and it loses its impact as its harmonics are cut-off. About three-quarters of an inch from the start of the record are heard several unison horn passages. Do the horns sound clean without any buzzing? Is there any rattling noticeable from the speaker or the cabinet? If you hear buzzing, it is a good indication that the pickup arm is not a good one. A good pickup arm will not rattle but a flimsy one will, thus causing a buzzing sound. If the cabinet, however, seems to rattle, do not condemn the model but just the particular machine in question, since rattles unfortunately will appear sometimes in the best built equipment.

Controls Needed

A phonograph that does not have a treble attenuating tone control, that is one which reduces high frequencies, should be considered definitely out. Two tone controls—one a bass booster and the other a treble attenuator—are desirable for best results in record reproduction. The insertion of a missing tone control at a later date, that is after purchase of a machine, is not recommended. Tone controls are not easily installed; never think of allowing anyone but a highly experienced man to attempt such a thing, otherwise you may end up with all sorts of distortion.

Phonograph records are now made with such an assortment of frequency responses that the treble control is definitely necessary. Particularly is this true in the reproduction of Decca, Capitol, Musicraft, and other makes of records that are made with a "rising characteristic" (that is, the volume of the high frequencies is increased or to be more exact peaked, to give a sharper and brighter tone to the upper point of frequency response on those machines which are not high-fidelity outfits). Thus, the attenuation control is required on machines with a wide range to subtract from these magnified high frequencies, otherwise the recording is brittle and shrill. Increasing the bass booster will not balance this condition. If the phono-

graph has a compensated volume control, so much the better. Check this point by turning down the volume and notice if the bass to treble ratio remains the same. If it does the volume control is compensated to make up for the ear's loss of sensitivity to low frequencies as the sound is reduced in volume. If there is no compensated volume control, the bass will just seem to drop out.

Testing The Motor

If you are satisfied to this point, stop to examine the instrument's works. With the lid open, and standing about a foot from the machine, the motor should be inaudible. If the motor is rim driven there may be a slight whirling sound, which is acceptable if the whirl does not attain the proportions of a rumble. Next, place your hands on the motor-board to ascertain if there is any excessive vibration. If there is vibration and it seems excessive, put on a record and note if there is a hum when the pickup is placed at the start before the music begins. If there is a hum, then the motor is either improperly mounted on the motor-board or the motor is just a poor one. Obviously, a machine with this condition is unsatisfactory. Put on side two of the *Zampa Overture* and listen for any changes of pitch or a fluttering sound on sustained tones in solo instruments. This will tell you whether the turntable is running true. These three last points, or tests, are very important. If any noticeable change in pitch is apparent in the revolving of the turntable, there will be a "wow", as it is called. If this warbling of the turntable is present the machine should be discarded. Motor defects are often the most troublesome and sometimes the first of the many potential shortcomings of an instrument. If you contemplate purchasing such a machine and replacing the motor, it is well to remember that both service and new parts are expensive these days. Parts, like motors, are sometimes hard to get, and buying a new motor blind may not assure better results. Before any machine is bought with the idea of replacing some part, it is well to find a competent source of service as well as supply, a service man who will effect a change of parts successfully or you will be stuck with a definite shortcoming to your machine about which you can do nothing.

Finally, ascertain if a motor is strong enough by playing a record first on the outside, then switching after a short period quickly to the inside of the record and note if any change of pitch occurs. If the motor is too weak for its job, it will be slowed down by the pickup on the outside of the record, and will gain speed as the pickup approaches the center of the disc.

Now, regarding the pickup: see that it looks sturdily built and that its pivots are free. Also make sure the pickup is not tilted one way or the other when operating on the record at different points. The business of a permanent-needle pickup versus an interchangeable needle pickup has been previously treated (see issue of Sept. 1945). Often the two types of cartridges are not interchangeable by virtue of the fact that each operates at a different pressure. Consequently, you must be willing to compromise on this point if the machine you are considering does not have the type you prefer. (If at a later date you want to replace the pickup, you must see that this is accomplished by a man who knows his business; this sort of thing can not always be done successfully.) A lightweight pickup is preferable, as it is easier on the records. Should you be in doubt about the pickup arm itself (be wary of flimsy-looking plastic arms!), play an organ recording and note whether the organ's low notes gaggle, and the pickup jumps grooves or repeats. If it does it is no good. The organ's low notes often cause the arm to vibrate, with the result that the tail (the pickup arm) wags the dog (the cartridge) and causes the pickup to jump and repeat a groove in severe cases.

The instrument's amplifier is the last consideration. If the phonograph has passed all the tests to this point, particularly with respect to quality, the amplifier should be satisfactory. However, take a loud recording, like the end of the *Zampa Overture*, and play it with the volume turned above a normal operating sound—in other words make it excessively loud. The quality should still be clean and clear. Should the quality become distorted, the amplifier is obviously not satisfactory. As a parting word of advice, make sure the cabinet is in excellent condition—free of scratches or visible marks.

For those who are not satisfied by commercial instruments and want a high-fidelity,

custom-built machine, the price will be high but the results will be worth it. However, just be careful to pick out a competent person or concern who builds such equipment—they do exist. (The editor will be glad to recommend such a builder to any interested reader in the New York area.)

In a forthcoming issue, I shall discuss automatic record changer mechanisms with points to be considered in their purchase and maintenance.

Editorial Notes

(Continued from page 2)

the commercialism which dominates the recording field, but we are cognizant of its existence on all sides. But even in commercialism there are things which stand out that have their true values, and we endeavor to see these.

We agree with our correspondent that the "heresy of presentism is to be found in some degree everywhere today", but not with his assertion "but nowhere to the extent it is prevalent here in America". The aftermath of a great upheaval like the recent war puts all things of the past into shaded recesses, even art. The necessity of coping with present-day conditions and living people dims the perception of the things and personalities of the past. Those of us who keep our connection with the past are fortunate indeed. But we do not think that because people cannot acquire the better things of yesterday and compromise with the best they can get today, they are to be tagged with an inferiority complex. The criteria of taste are lamentable in this country, as well as elsewhere, if we judge from the recordings that sell the most. But not all people who are drawn to music, or any other art, are aware of its best values, and we cannot help recalling what a psychologist once said to us: "I daresay that those who admire what is called the second-rate are happier than those who cannot compromise with their superior tastes."

The "heresy of presentism", my correspondent contends, "is the perfect expression of the American inferiority complex". But why, we are inclined to ask, confine this

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POVLA FRIJSH

AND STYLE IN SINGING

By Philip L. Miller

Perhaps there is no more fitting way in which to open a discussion of the art of Povla Frijsh than by using that often misunderstood word, style. In a sense style is the most vital essential in music, for to say that an artist has it is high praise, and to intimate that he lacks it is complete condemnation. Every musician of any standing, creative or interpretative, must possess style, yet it is so personal a thing that there is no absolute standard by which it may be judged. As generally understood, creative style is quite a different thing from style in interpretation. The interpreter must subject himself wholly to the composer—submerge his own personality, and become, for the moment, merely the mouthpiece of the man whose message he is delivering. Ob-

viously this is only partly true, because if it were possible so to efface the personality of the performer such devotion would result only in colorlessness and lack of temperament. Toscanini has often been praised for his self-effacement. The secret of his greatness, we are told, lies in his absolute devotion to the letter of every score he conducts. Yet anyone who has heard Toscanini knows that he has a personal style, and that his performances are just as unmistakable to the connoisseur as those of the most personalized or mannered performer. The same is true of every great artist—of Pablo Casals, of Bruno Walter, of Artur Schnabel, of Joseph Szigeti, and of Povla Frijsh.

What, after all, is style but personality? What is it that constitutes the style of a

literary artist? Why is it that even the less familiar poetry of Shakespeare stands out clearly from the works of his contemporaries? What is it that makes his dramas live on, while other plays appear, hold the boards for a while, and then disappear into limbo? The obvious answer, of course, is that Shakespeare's dramas have the quality of greatness, but what is that quality? Great thoughts alone do not make it, nor great conceptions certainly. It is the way in which the thoughts are expressed, and it is exactly this which we call style. *Hamlet* is a personal expression of Shakespeare's mind—the result of the play of his wisdom, his experience and his thought processes on a story of which a lesser mentality might have made just another drama. And *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the result of that same mentality playing upon a very different subject. No two works could be more different, yet both are thoroughly characteristic. The one is serious almost to the point of gloominess, the other light and, yes, frivolous, yet the hand of the same master is recognizable in both.

The Poets

Consider the poet Paul Verlaine, certainly the darling of modern French song composers. There is an unmistakable Verlaine quality—indeed this quality is so striking that settings of his poems are not hard to recognize even when wedded to the music of such individualists as Debussy, Fauré, and Reynaldo Hahn. Or, to go over to the German, think of Goethe, unquestionably one of the most prolific sources of lieder-texts. Take three of his poems at random: *Der Erlkoenig*, *Haidenroeslein* and *Liebhaber in allen Gestalten*, all of which were set to music by Schubert. Various as the subjects are—and the manner of each is governed by the subject—each is an expression of Goethe's personality and philosophy. The same can be said of Schubert's music. This "common denominator" in the work of a creative artist, then, is what we call his style. And the emergence of style in his art is the sign of his maturity. He may pass through various creative periods in which his style undergoes notable changes, yet so long as he is the same person, the interrelation among his works remains.

Now if this is true of the creative artist, and if personality and temperament are desirable or indeed indispensable attributes of great interpretative art, what is it that constitutes the style of a musician whose expression involves merging his own individuality with that of the music he interprets? Is there something more than the sheer personal sound of an individual voice or instrument that sets apart the work of a truly great interpreter? Unquestionably there is, and this again we must define as style. It is style in this sense which so strongly characterizes the singing of Pevla Frijsh.

A Song Reflects Life

"A song rightly sung reflects life. It is a uniting with deep experience—the same deep experience as felt by the poet and the composer at the moment of creation." This, in her own words, indicates Mme. Frijsh's approach, and this approach explains at least in part just what makes her work stand out in such bold relief in that of the singers of her day. She is not interested in a song as a vehicle for her art, but rather dedicates herself and all her resources to the fullest possible realization of the song's musical and poetic content. Throughout her long career she has been noted not only as one of the foremost interpreters of song, but as the builder of possibly the most distinctive programs of any vocal recitalist. She has an uncanny ability to seek out the best in contemporary song literature; with this she balances a goodly representation of early classical airs, lieder, French and Scandinavian songs. The fact that she sings a new song is recommendation enough to many of her colleagues; it is well known that she will not sing one unless she finds it good, and her taste is extraordinarily fastidious. This is not to say that every song she sings is a masterpiece of classic eloquence—on the contrary, she does not demand like qualities in all her songs, but rather seeks to find contrasts. A Frijsh recital is a series of moods, from grave to gay—as many moods as there are songs on the program. She has never been content to build a recital in the traditional groupings of languages and styles, but aims to make each song stand out as a thing in itself. Admittedly such a procedure would be unsafe for a less skillful interpreter,

but it is not impossible that in the future more programs will be built this way.

One grows tired of hearing the complaint that Frijsh "hasn't any voice". If this were true, indeed, she would be no singer, and a singer in the highest sense she certainly is. The fact is that she places great emphasis on the voice and on the technique of voice production. "But who would go to hear Heifetz," she asks, "if with the most beautiful violin tone in the world he were to spend the evening playing nothing but scales?" How could she make an effect with such a song as Sinding's *Norwegian Love Song* if her voice quality were not appealing? It is the simplest kind of song, relying on a soft caressing tone and beautiful phrasing. On the other hand, when she sings a big song like Schubert's *An Schwager Kronos*, it is her understanding pronouncement of the Goethe text which carries everything. Every song has its mood and manner; every song has its own tone quality and emotional range. "The interpretation of a song," she says, "begins with a study of the words. It is the poem out of which the music grows, and the poem will color the voice if the voice is freely produced."

A True Musician

But for all her emphasis on the word, Mme. Frijsh is first and foremost a musician. Music has been a part of her as long as she can remember. "Father was a doctor, exceedingly musical," she says, "and so was my mother. In fact it was music which first brought them together. They met at the Danish town of Aarhus (Jutland) where they both sang parts in the local music society performance of Schumann's *Der Rose Pilgerfahrt*. At five and a half I was put at the piano and given lessons. Father used to put songs in front of me, and when I was six years old I used to play them for him. In this way I became familiar with the songs of Robert Franz and of Schumann, who was my father's favorite composer. At the age of fourteen I used to go to Copenhagen twice a month for lessons with Ove Christensen. At seventeen I was sent to Paris to learn to sing, and at nineteen was touring with Thibaud and Casals. But first I had to be a good pianist before father would allow me to sing. Also I played the violin and could read scores.

"But one very important thing I got from my early familiarity with the Franz and Schumann songs. I knew even as a child that the foundation of these songs was the poetry, and I played the music at the piano as I felt the words. This is something which should be realized by every accompanist as well as by every singer: before beginning to play a song the words must be understood. I suppose this point of view accounts for my own preference for certain composers—Fauré, Schubert, Grieg, Bach—all of whom placed great emphasis upon their texts. With Bach this idea goes further than his purely vocal works. I often wonder how many organists play the chorale preludes in recital without having studied the full texts of the chorales upon which these pieces are founded. Certainly it is in the words that we must look for the secret of Bach's intentions.

Casals' Influence

"I learned a great deal on that first tour from the great musicians with whom I was associated, perhaps most of all from Casals. He taught me much about phrasing and about timing—for instance the fact that *largo*, when it is properly rhythmical, is really a moderate tempo. Because it moves steadily it seems slow. Similarly, rapid passages, when sung cleanly, will give the impression of being faster and more brilliant than when they are hurried and uneven. You cannot say this tempo is right or this tempo is wrong: a tempo is right if you are free in it. Casals always used to play as an encore Fauré's *Après un rêve*. His tempo was faster than that of most singers. It moved. How many instrumentalists play this song without even so much as reading the poem that inspired it!"

Perhaps Mme. Frijsh may thank her early strict musical training for the fact that though she occasionally uses considerable freedom in her singing of a song, she is never guilty of losing the essential rhythm. This is particularly striking in view of her great insistence on the importance of the word, and her skill and imagination in vocal coloring. "Rhythm," she says, "is always important, even when singing is free." Singing, that is, must never fall short of musical standards, however important interpretation may be.

I suppose that most of us have wondered where Mme. Frijsh finds the varied material with which she makes up her programs. Her explanation is simple: "I spend all my time gathering material." The more serious of the contemporary American composers have come to know this, and many of them, make a point of arranging to have her see the best of their songs. It would be impossible in a short space to recall all the well-known modern songs which she has introduced. It is certainly true that the standards of song composition in America have risen notably in the last ten years or so, and it is hardly to be questioned that Mme. Frijsh has played her part in bringing this about. Especially notable is the present-day tendency to set worthwhile poems—the names of Elinor Wylie, Edna St. Vincent Millay, E. E. Cummings, William Rose Benet, Housman, James Stephens, and other leading poets share the honors of her programs with such composers as Paul Bowles, Rebecca Clarke, John Duke, William Ames, Bela Wilder, and John St. Edmunds.

The feature of her three New York recitals during the season just past was the introduction of a wealth of new Poulenc songs. Poulenc is no novelty on Frijsh programs—more than one of his earlier and lighter songs has brought roars of laughter to her audiences—but this was a new Poulenc. At one time considered the "bright boy" of Satie's little group of disciples, this composer has emerged as probably the most significant French song writer since Fauré. Certainly in his new songs we hear the authentic voice of his country during the dark days through which she has been passing. Surely no one who heard Mme. Frijsh sing *Les ponts de Cé* will forget it. Here Poulenc has set a poem of Louis Aragon, whose position as the most important of the French war-poets would seem to be unquestioned, a poem of deep and poignant memory, and he has given it unforgettable music. Gone is the waggish and ironic humor of the old Poulenc—the Poulenc of *Le Bestiaire* and the Max Jacob settings. It may be too early to be positive about it, but it seems altogether likely that the composer will assume a position among the artists of his day comparable to that of the poet. Mme. Frijsh tells of a series of ad-

ventures by which she was able to get hold of perhaps the only copies in New York of certain of these latest songs. Now, since she has sung them, they are beginning to appear in American editions.

It is certainly time for a re-issue of the two albums of records which this artist has made for Victor. And it is to be hoped that some arrangement will be made for the recording of some of these Poulenc songs. Aside from the question of their timeliness, they should be preserved while we have available the interpreter who is doing so much to establish their traditions. I predict that they will be sung in the years to come, but I doubt that another singer will bring to them quite the insight, the variety of expression, and the beauty which are at Mme. Frijsh's command.

Editorial Notes

(Continued from page 6)

condition to America alone; surely it is worldwide. We do agree with him that "the close proximity of genius, as Shaw has so well said, not merely shames the inferior person, it actually frightens him and makes him feel insecure. And when you have a whole country made up of mostly inferior persons, as in the case of America, the result is 'American behavior: the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind'". Again, why confine this to our country alone? Can our correspondent name a country that is not "made up mostly of inferior [from his point of view] persons"? Moreover, his point of view brings up another issue: what of the people who suffer from a superiority complex; are they always right, does not the soft laugh or the sneer bespeak a mental congestion? The question is not intended to imply a personal criticism, but is advanced as a point of commonsense.

Most of us will agree with the final paragraph of our correspondent's letter: "Like all heresies, presentism must pass some day, for it is as false as the rest and contains the seeds of its own decay, but it is painful to live in the midst of its unpleasant manifestations." And yet, the moment is living, for tomorrow, though it may always be there, is a dream. There are enduring values of the day and these should suffice for those who are capable of realizing them.



PERSONAL PREFERENCES

By James Norwood

This is the third in a series of articles which we have invited former contributors and various critics across country to write for us. Mr. Norwood calls himself the "inquiring music lover" from Brooklyn. "I am proud of my Brooklyn heritage," he says. "The music lover in Brooklyn enjoys his home and records more than any mad Manhattanite possibly could. There is a peacefulness to Brooklyn, and more folks there would rather travel to your home for a musical evening than go to a public concert hall. I reluctantly visit Manhattan on occasion." Mr. Norwood is also an ardent baseball fan and a great rooter for the Brooklyn Dodgers. When they lose he contends he hums Stravinsky in protest, when they win he swears he whistles Bach. Asked what tune, he replied: "Oh, just Bach"—Editor.

Music is my hobby. Being an adventurous person by nature, I like to hear all sorts and kinds of music. My preferences, if such they can be honestly labelled, might be the result of a momentary mood or whim, which may in turn be guided by the wishes of a friend. Let me explain: the mood might be one of intimacy, in which case I turn to some chamber music or well sung lieder; or I might be smitten with a desire for the sound of the symphony orchestra, in which case I usually pick a classical work and either a romantic or modern one as a sort of balance to the mood; or I might want to hear some good dance music or a bit of swing. I have travelled far and wide in the quest of music, to concert halls, opera houses, night clubs and out of the way spots to satisfy an urge.

I cannot say that results were always what I expected much less wanted, for the mood, in my estimation, is best suited by making one's own program, and recordings permit one to do this sort of thing best of all. I think that it was this desire to fit the music to a mood that prompted me to become a record collector. Not being a musician, I have enjoyed a lot of music that the person trained in the mysteries of the art might consider unworthy of his learned attention. I offer no apologies for my tastes.

I have found that a mood can be induced by a friend, and looking back over some of the impromptu programs that friends have requested, I remember some of my pleasantest evenings with music. The pleasure of sharing things with a friend cannot be over-

estimated. What matter if a friend makes the most outlandishly lopsided program of music one could conceive; the fact remains he wants to hear those things, and I think meeting his wishes creates a sort of mood which I find pleasant for the time being. More often than not, it revives interest in many musical pieces I have not heard for months.

Musical psychologists tell us that "melody is the primary musical phenomenon and the characteristic vehicle of musical significance". I must say that melody means everything to me. I've listened to a lot of modern music without feeling, as some of my neighbors have felt, that it was something devised to set a listener squirming in his seat. I think honestly I could take any kind of music—once. But any urge on my part to hear it again or know it better would be prompted by melody. Dissonance for dissonance's sake seems to me a poor excuse for any music. I have attended lectures by musicologists, psychologists and musicians, and classes by well known teachers of musical appreciation. I have gathered a few ideas and have been prompted by a lot of suggestions, but I have always found in the final analysis that music itself had more to say than most of the people that wrote and talked about it. But I would not pass up the privilege of reading about music, because the subject is so fascinating; moreover, people who know music often provide us with excursions into the art which we might not have made without their guidance. There are a lot of people to whom the promulgators of musical appreciation are educators and to whom anything with the word "education" in it is anathema. But only fools, in my estimation, reason this way. Only those who have lived intimately with music are able to talk intimately upon the art. There are those who will accept guidance from a friend but who shun guidance from someone who is perhaps more capable of giving it than the friend.

Now, I will admit that country by-ways and lanes often provide some fascinating adventures in driving, but they seldom get us anywhere. Maps have been laid out for a definite purpose and those that devise them usually take into consideration the spots of interest we should discover. And with most music books it is much the same. I have

read many books but none which developed my sense of music appreciation as broadly and as pleasurably as *Music In History*, by Howard D. McKinney and W. R. Anderson (American Book Co., 1940). Readers of this magazine are familiar with one of these writers, the English critic and musicologist—W. R. Anderson; he has a way with music all his own, he knows much about the amenities of the art. I agree with McKinney and Anderson, and the editor of this magazine, that "no mere introduction to such an art as music can satisfy an eager student" (I would alter the word "student" to "music lover"). A historical survey of the art brings about a greater appreciation, a fulfillment of adventure that no amount of haphazard listening can ever do. One does not have to share wholeheartedly the viewpoints of an author to derive profit from reading his book. I have given the above mentioned book as a Christmas gift to a lot of friends who needed guidance in music appreciation and almost everyone of them has been highly pleased with the avenues of musical adventure it opened up. Had they been minded to take a course in music appreciation they would have been exposed to such a book. But since most of them are of the sort who fight shy of anything with the word "education" in it, they needed the prompting of a friend.

Another book, along similar lines, which I have found stimulating is *An Introduction to Music* by Martin Bernstein (Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1937). I have attended Prof. Bernstein's classes at New York University and found him an astute scholar and a lively lecturer on the art. His book is not for the novice or for the man who cannot read music, for it developed out of his class work and contains many musical illustrations which point up his arguments. There are other books, but I shall not make this treatise one on reading; but since many of my preferences among records were developed by reading, I feel I should put in a word for those who write about music.

It is my premise that writers on music should not burden us with their dislikes. It has become the fashion in modern times to be hyper-critical, I'd even go so far as to say facetiously critical. The smart Alec in advertising has invaded the music field, and we find a lot of writers on music who

seem to delight in telling us that this or that composer is really no good, and that all the people who have enjoyed him for so many, many years are not real music lovers, etc., poor Tchaikowsky takes an awful beating at the hands of many, and Brahms and Schumann are frequently shamefully disparaged. Now none of these composers might satisfy all our moods, but I feel they would take care of quite a few. I steer clear of the musical writer who has prejudices; he's wrapped up in his own ego and lacks the universal approach to the most universal of all arts. No one composer can be the satisfying companion day by day for Everyman in all his humors; the sensitive music-lover will seek satisfaction for his moods in many quarters.

In selecting my 'personal preferences' I shall be governed in part by my mood at writing. There are great works of music which I would mention, and perhaps should, but I think it might be more interesting to show some of my "personal preferences" among things which I would characterize as out of the beaten track. To arrive at my decisions, I have looked over my catalogue of recordings, and since these are listed alphabetically, they have been selected in the same way. The 'A's' in music are not so auspicious as the 'B's', but I refuse to pass by the first letter of the alphabet. I can overlook Addinsell and his *Warsaw Concerto*, which I bought in a rash moment; this is lush music that fits a party mood but certainly has not anything of permanent value to it. But Albéniz, the Spaniard, recalls many pleasureable moments to me, so let us start with him.

Albéniz: *Iberia Suite—Evocation, El Puerto, Fête Dieu, Triana* (arr. Arbos); The Madrid Symphony Orchestra, conducted by E. F. Arbos. Columbia set 130.

I prefer the orchestral arrangements of Albéniz's colorful and rhythmically fascinating pieces to the original piano versions. It is annoying to discover that my first "personal preference" is deleted from the catalogue. Since these orchestral recordings are no longer available, I would not recommend that the reader try to pick them up in the open market because I know he'll be subjected to a price out of all proportion. Further, I think it is only a matter of time

before this orchestral suite will be duplicated; rumor has it that Fiedler has had it in mind for some time. But, as Mr. Girard said in his article on Albéniz's *Iberia* (see issue of *The American Music Lover* for August 1943), once we have heard the orchestral pieces from *Iberia* in the Arbos arrangements, 'we are not apt to feel that the piano suffices'. The "subtle shades" of some of this music, which are not quite fully conveyed in a piano recording, are heightened in the orchestral arrangement. I think that Arbos—one of the greatest Spanish musicians of his time—did the composer a real service in orchestrating five excerpts from the two suites which make up his collection of piano pieces known as *Iberia*.

Appalachian Folk Song (arr. Niles); *I Wonder as I Wander*; and Mignone: *Cantiga de Ninar*; Gladys Swarthout (mezzo-soprano), with orchestra and with piano and cello. Victor disc 10-1181.

Miss Swarthout is completely *en rapport* with her musical material. The beauty and simplicity of sentiment recreated in the folk song are as timeless as the mountain country from which it came. Its mood is perfectly caught and conveyed by the singer. The companion song, a lullaby by the Brazilian composer, fits Miss Swarthout's voice like the proverbial glove, and the charm of the mood is completed by the artistic teamwork of her associates—Lester Hodges (piano) and Lucien Schaidt (cello).

I suppose I should select some of the great works from the "three B's", but others will do this and perhaps accomplish their purposes better than I. Instead I shall speak of some lesser works by these masters, which certain artists have performed so unusually that I find myself returning to them quite often. I will not argue with those who contend that Edwin Fischer has given us a well played version of the Bach *D minor Concerto*, via the piano, in Victor set 252, but I much prefer the violin playing of Szigeti in Columbia set 418—there is more vitality in the performance and the violin serves the work much better than the piano or, for that matter I suspect, the harpsichord. For an example of Bachian melody that transcends time and space, I recommend the chorale, *Jesu, Joy of Man's De-*

siring from *Cantata 147*—especially in the performance by the Temple Church Choir of London with the obligato oboe part beautifully played by Leon Goossens (Victor disc 4286). I've never been able to make up my mind whether it is the artistry of Goossens that sways me toward this disc or not. I rather think it is because although I admire Myra Hess' piano version (Victor disc 4538), I play the choral version more often. From Beethoven I select rather curiously, I will admit, the following:

Beethoven: *In questa tomba*; sung by Chaliapin. Victor disc 6822.

Chaliapin was a law unto himself and his singing of this song is definitely theatrical, but he gives it a vital and expressive utterance that never fails to impress all listeners.

The songs of Brahms are always a joy to me but there are so many to recommend. The artistry of Elena Gerhardt needs no endorsement from me. I have always been profoundly grateful for her short Brahms recital on Victor discs 7793 and 7794 (the latter has been withdrawn). The arrangement and selection of the songs are admirable: they are: *Feldeinsamkeit*, *Nachtingall*, *Staendchen* (disc 7793), and *Auf dem Kirchhofe*, *Vergebliches Staendchen*, and *Das Maedchen spricht* (disc 7794).

Berlioz: *L'Absence*; sung by Maggie Teyte (soprano), with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Leslie Heward.

This disc can only be bought on import and as part of a set of four including songs of Berlioz, Duparc and Debussy also. Let it be said at the beginning that Miss Teyte sings them all with exceptional artistry, but none with the perfection of feeling which she brings to this neglected song by Berlioz. I often wondered if Miss Teyte could duplicate the perfection of the mood she got in the recording, and was agreeably surprised to find that she could when she sang this song at the opening of her first Telephone Hour program on the air in August 1945. Despite a far from satisfactory accompaniment by the Telephone Hour Orchestra, the British soprano came through with flying colors.

Bloch: *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*; Joseph Szigeti and the Paris Conservatory Orchestra, conducted by Charles Münch. Columbia set 380.

Ernest Bloch is the Hebraic rhapsodist *par excellence*; although his music is racial, it has none of the harsh patriarchal quality of Hebraism. His emotions are intensified and his songful, improvisatory manner of writing is both individual and arresting. Once one comes under his spell one finds his music has an enduring quality which cannot be explained. Szigeti, that supreme patrician of the fiddle, plays this concerto superbly. Bloch has written greater works than this—his *Quintet* for piano and strings, and his *Sonata* for violin and piano, both of which Victor once had in unrivalled recorded performances but since these are now deleted from the catalogue I recommend the *Concerto*, which possesses a most impressive opening movement.

Chausson: *Symphony in B flat major*; The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Frederick Stock. Victor set 950.

I fully agree with the editor that Chausson's symphony is a more "communicative" one than the Franck, and further that it hangs together better. Every writer talks about the influence of Franck and Wagner in this music, but none speaks of an influence that has benefited in passing through the Chausson crucible. I find myself communing more often with Mr. Chausson than with Mr. Franck—I've grown a bit weary of the latter's symphony. One of the things for which Mr. Stock will long be remembered is his fine performance of this work.

Delius: *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring*; The London Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Constant Lambert. Victor disc 4496.

I am not a Delius idolator, but I think he is badly abused by a lot of writers. His was a super-sensitive temperament and his search for beauty and truth was fanatical. There are other works of his I like—*In a Summer Garden*, *Brigg Fair*, and *Sea Drift*—but none has the quietly communicative poetic mood of this fragrant interlude of the English countryside. I recommend it as an introduction to Delius for those who do not know him.

Dvorak: *Symphony No. 4*; The Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Vaclav Talich. Victor set 304.

I wish more people would take the detour around Dvorak's *New World* that I have done and grow to know his fourth symphony, his second, and even his first. The spirit of nature hovers over this music; it has been called the most national in flavor of all his symphonies. There is charm and strength in the opening movement and a slow movement that far surpasses the Largo of the *New World*. Alec Robertson in his book on the composer (E. P. Dutton & Co.) says this movement "could stand as a miniature tone-poem of Czech village life described by a highly sensitive man," and further he takes it "to be one of the considerable achievements of symphonic literature". The Czech Philharmonic Orchestra was a great organization and Talich a fine conductor—one wonders how the men of the orchestra and the conductor survived the war. Their music-making belongs to another era, but one which can never be forgotten as long as their recordings are available.

Gluck: *Orphée et Eurydice*. Columbia Operatic Set 15.

The music of Gluck's *Orphée* has classic grandeur and nobility, but as much as I like it I am continually frustrated by the part of Orphée being sung by a woman. Yet Alice Raveau, who sings the role in this set, has a rich, expressive contralto, and Eurydice is entrusted to the light, ingratiating soprano of Germaine Féraldy—an excellent foil. I am given to understand that tenors have sung Orpheus on occasion, and I have good reason to believe that the results would be most gratifying, since the French Columbia recording (disc D15223) that Joseph Rogatchewsky once made of the Recitative and Aria, *Objet de mon amour*, from Act I, has long been a prized possession of mine. Mr. Rogatchewsky succeeds in creating an illusion that is gratifying not only to me but to a number of my women friends. Still, I value this practically complete recording of this opera.

Respighi: *Impressions of Brazil*; The Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, con-

ducted by Oswald Kabasta. H.M.V. discs DB4643/44.

It is the sheer magic of Respighi's tonal coloring, the sensuous appeal of this music, that prompts me to recommend it to the attention of others who may have their moods when this sort of thing is desirable. The score follows the pattern of the composer's *Fountains of Rome* and *Pines of Rome*—three vivid impressions painted with colors that only an ardent Latin could realize: (1) *Tropical Night*, (2) *Butantan*, a garden in Sao Paolo, (3) *Canzone and Danza*. The recording was made in Germany prior to the war and can be had on import from England. The reproduction is superb and Kabasta, German or no German, gives an excellent performance.

Tchaikovsky: *Symphony No. 2*; The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Eugene Goossens. Victor set 790.

Commonly called the "Little-Russian" Symphony because it reveals more national influences than any other of Tchaikovsky's symphonies, this work deserves to be heard oftener than it is. The composer is more the true symphonist here than in any of his last three symphonies, where he dramatizes his own emotions to a point which can weary the listener. Maybe the last three symphonies are greater personal documents but the objectivism of this work gives us a refreshing and healthful view of the composer which is all to the good. Goossens gives the symphony a fine performance which is brilliantly recorded. A more recent performance of this work by the Santa Monica Civic Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Jacques Rachmilovich (Symphony Record Set 101) has its merits, but the performance has not the excellence of Goossens'.

I find I have talked about a number of recordings without beginning to name one-tenth of my "personal preferences". Looking over my notes, I find I had intended to mention works by Falla, Fauré, Franck, Handel, Mozart, Ravel, Schumann, Sibelius, Spohr, Richard Strauss (I wanted to recommend some of his songs), Vaughan Williams, Verdi and Wagner. Maybe some time the editor will let me have another go at this sort of thing, but others will no doubt carry on from where I left off and will do justice to the composers I've omitted.

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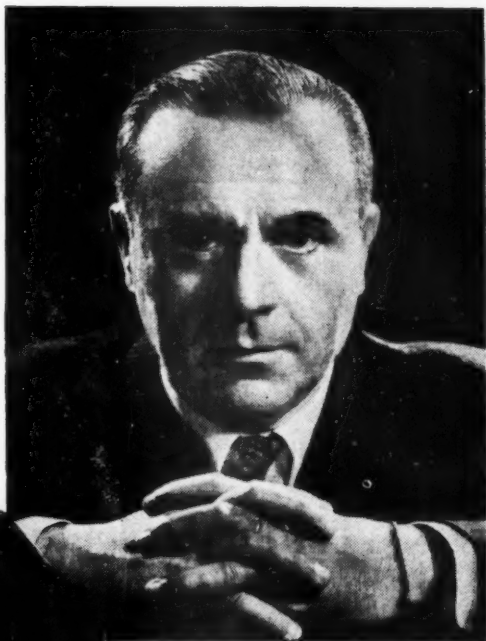
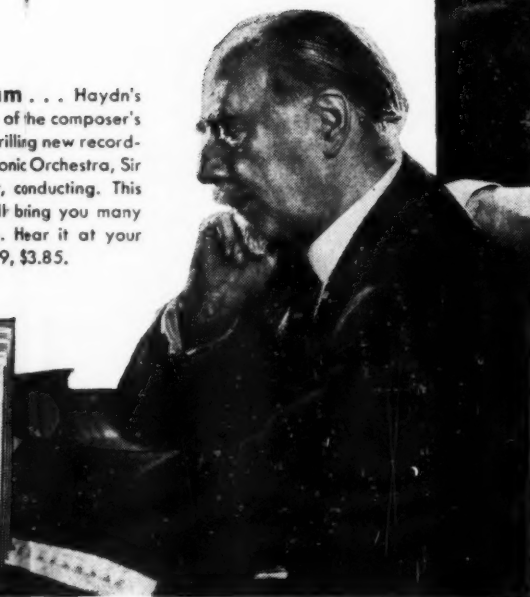
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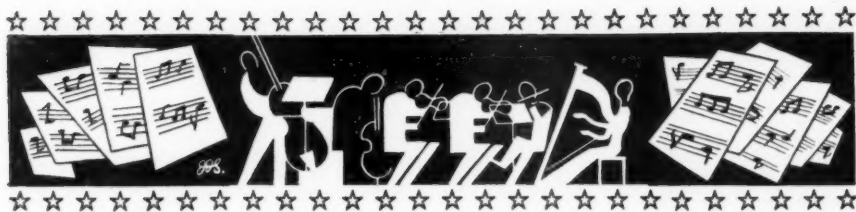
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RECORD NOTES AND REVIEWS

It is the purpose of this department to review monthly all worthwhile recordings. If at any time we happen to omit a record in which the reader is particularly interested, we shall be glad to give our opinion of the recording on written request. Correspondents are requested to enclose self-addressed stamped envelopes.

We believe that record buyers would do well to order by title rather than by number such items as they may wish to purchase. Numbers are sometimes printed incorrectly in our sources.

All prices given are without tax.

Orchestra

BRAHMS: *Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Opus 68*; played by the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York, direction of Artur Rodzinski. Columbia set M or MM-621, five discs, price \$5.85.

▲ Mr. Steinweiss's attractive cover, with its Grecian implications, belies the interpretative contents of this set, for Mr. Rodzinski's performance is far from being the coolly sculptured art of the design. Indeed, Mr.

Rodzinski gives a warm-hued performance, one in which the romantic in Brahms is implied but not exaggerated as Mr. Stokowski tends to do. Perhaps the prime asset of this set, in relation to the recent Stokowski, is the superior quality of the solo playing in the Philharmonic; here we have an oboist who does full justice to Brahms' melodies and the beautiful quality of the solo flute in the opening of the last movement is a moment to remember in this recording.

The reproduction here is splendidly attained; the range of dynamics is admirably handled, despite the fact that the pianissimo pizzicati at the beginning of the finale are almost too faint. But the smoothness of the discs preserves the niceties of the soft passages without those often obtrusive blemishes which defeat similar passages in other recordings.

Mr. Rodzinski deserves to be praised for this performance; it is one of the best things he has accomplished with the Philharmonic Orchestra. One is inclined not to compare him with others in his interpretation of a familiar work on records, but to accept him on his own. The response of the orchestra, the cleanness of the playing, and the consistent ease and warmth of motion suggest considerable preparation, and also show what the conductor has done in bettering the orchestra since he took it over.

Cecil Gray contends that Brahms was always the composer of songs even in his symphonies, and one suspects that Mr. Rodzinski takes this viewpoint, for his performance tends to favor the lyrical qualities of the work and every melody is treated in a songful manner. There is very little of the heroic quality associated with Brahms in the playing of the first movement here; the drama is not pronounced but rather submerged to the clarification of the melodic material. It almost seems as though Rodzinski had read a passage from the book, *Ten Composers*, by the English-Australian critic Neville Cardus, in which the latter says: "The music of Brahms was seldom disturbed by the dramatic change of stress which with Beethoven became the principal characteristic of the symphony. A contrast of Beethoven and Brahms in terms of orchestral dynamics will illumine this point. . . . Forceful insistence on the same note or chord is a dramatic, not a lyrical device; it means a breaking-up of a song-sequence. Brahms' use of repeated notes falls short of Beethoven's disregard of a melodic context; Brahms scarcely ever forgot that the reiterated chord is fatal to the flow and fullness of song. When Brahms' music does halt or contends gruffly, it does not forget the course of song; Brahms is merely clearing his throat and chest before beginning again."

In the second movement, the neatness of the phrasing gives evidence of careful and conscientious musicianship. The gentleness and warmth of feeling suggests to me that the conductor has a fondness for this music. His interpretation here, as elsewhere, borders on the romantic, but does not go in for the romantic or dramatic excesses of Stokowski. The essentially delicate texture of the Allegretto is nicely preserved, and there is a cogent strength in the playing of the finale, although the handling of the coda (last record face) with its sudden anticipation of Brahms' quickening of speed lacks the inspiration which is found in Toscanini's performance.

The most inspired performance of this work on records remains, for me, the Toscanini. There is a just consideration of Brahms' dramatic quality and his songful lyricism. But of all other conductors who have performed this work on records, I

think Rodzinski proves himself as persuasive a spokesman for the score as any. He brings more rhythmic lilt to the music than Weingartner and none of the indeterminate alterations of tempi of which Walter is guilty. So, all in all, justly considered, this is no mere duplication of an almost too familiar work.
—P.H.R.

FRANCK: *Symphony in D minor*; played by the Philadelphia Orchestra, direction of Eugene Ormandy. Columbia set M or MM-608, five discs, price \$5.85.

▲ There are three other performances of this symphony listed in Columbia's catalogue—the last to be released being the Beecham set (December 1941). The Mitropoulos version was issued in February 1941, at a time when Columbia's orchestral recording was open to controversy. The Canbert version dates back 15 years. It is a pity that the Mitropoulos performance was not better recorded because it has dignity and strength and reveals some niceties of musical perception which were deserving of better reproduction. The Beecham performance is a curious understatement of the music, but should be valued for its discriminating taste and musicianship. The reading is earnest, if not impassioned, and appealing, if not overpowering. For diametrically opposite values, one can turn to Stokowski, who "gilds the lily" and gives Franck's music all of the qualities of a Babylonian feast. I think that Monteux and the San Francisco Symphony are heard to best advantage in this music. He handles the grandiloquent qualities of the score with taste and understanding musicianship; Monteux's readings of almost any French music are sensitively molded. The reproduction of the San Francisco Orchestra is entirely admirable to my way of thinking, even though it does not have the semblance of highs that we find in other orchestras, but I understand that some listeners do not regard its reproduction as favorably as others.

It is the sound of the Philadelphia Orchestra here that will give this set precedence with many. The dark, plangent beauty of the strings is reproduced with rare fidelity, and the solo instruments are equally well reproduced. There are some horn passages which may cause momentary trouble with

poor pickups, but there is less of this sort of thing than in some other recent sets of which readers have complained. Mr. Ormandy's reading of this work is straightforward on the whole, almost business-like in its conscientious exactitude of phrase and line. The expansive eloquence of the music is not exaggerated. As admirable as his interpretation is from the standpoint of exacting leadership and orchestral virtuosity, I find it lacks the freedom of expression of the Monteux version. But for sheer beauty of orchestral sound, this new set tops them all. However, since beauty of sound in itself is only an outward aspect of any music, the listener should give at least equal thought to interpretative values. Since not all of us agree on such matters, I recommend that the listener hear the Becchan, the Monteux and this set. Each has its praiseworthy qualities and in the final analysis it boils down to what one hears and likes in Franck and what one wants exploited. All three of these sets are excellently recorded.

—P.H.R.

MASSENET: *Le Cid*—Ballet Music; played by the Boston "Pops" Orchestra, direction of Arthur Fiedler. Victor 10-inch set, M or DM-1058, three discs, price \$3.00.

▲ The folk music of Spain has been imitated by quite a number of French composers with varying degrees of success. Two years before Massenet wrote this music (1885), Chabrier composed his famous *Spanish Rhapsody*. It was to be expected when Massenet selected the famous Spanish hero, El Cid, as an operatic figure that his score would have some Spanish flavor in it. And since the ballet was always a feature of French opera, what more logical place to have the Spanish touch? The dances of Spain lent local color, which the vocal parts of the score can hardly be said to have done. The seven parts of this ballet are based on characteristic dances of the Iberian peninsula; some of the melodies Massenet is said to have jotted down while in Spain. His treatment of them is efficient if not inspiring. There is a certain Gallic sophistication to this music, but, as the annotator of the set tells us, this is purely decorative music, and I daresay operatic audiences were more interested in the dancers than in the music. *Le Cid* is an opera in which Jean De Reszke often ap-

peared, and in its time it occupied a conspicuous place in the repertory of the Paris Opéra. Today, the music seems dated, especially this light, polished ballet music. Speaking of *Le Cid* reminds us of a fine mezzo-soprano aria, *Pleurez mes yeux*, which is neglected these days. There is a recording of this however, by Suzanne Sten (Columbia disc 17368-D) which is well worth looking up. It is unfortunate that Columbia withdrew the two arias from this opera which the talented French tenor, Georges Thill, once made (disc 9124-M); for it is a fine disc, in which Thill sings with a style of manly nobility.

Mr. Fiedler seems to me the ideal conductor for music like this. He is forthright and incisive and the recording is excellently accomplished.

—P.G.

SIX DANCES: *The Red Poppy*—Russian Sailors' Dance (Glière); *Malazarle*—Baltique (Fernandez); *The Bartered Bride*—Dance of the Comedians (Smetana); *Slavonic Dance No. 10 in E minor* (Dvorak); *Hungarian Dance No. 5* (Brahms); *Wine, Women and Song*—Waltz (Johann Strauss); played by the Philadelphia Orchestra "Pops", first two directed by Saul Caston, others by Eugene Ormandy. Columbia set M-588, three discs, price \$3.85.

▲ A hybrid collection of dance material which, in my estimation, lacks unity and

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fails to sustain interest. Considered separately, every item in this album has its appeal, but bunched together one selection sort of effaces another until at the end the only memory sustained is the badly cut-up version of the Johann Strauss waltz.

From the reproductive aspect, each record side would seem to be up to Columbia's best standards with the Philadelphia Orchestra. The orchestra employed here, however, is only a portion of the full ensemble, but apparently from the results obtained enough to do justice to the music performed. The first disc serves to introduce Saul Caston, former assistant conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra and now conductor of the Denver Symphony Orchestra, to record buyers. Mr. Caston's performances of the *Russian Sailors' Dance* and *Batuque* are neatly contrived and quite as good as any other recordings of these items. Mr. Ormandy turns in brilliant performances of the Smetana, Dvorak and Brahms dances, but his mutilated version of the Strauss waltz should never have been issued. One returns to the Weingartner version (Columbia disc 71210-D) for a smoother, warmer and more persuasive interpretation of the complete waltz. —P.G.

STRAVINSKY: *Four Norwegian Moods*; played by the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York, direction of Igor Stravinsky. Columbia disc 12371-D, price \$1.00.

▲ I wonder how many regular concert-goers, if given a blind-fold test, would be able to identify this short suite as the work of Stravinsky. Its title should prepare us for the general style of the work, but it is amazing to realize that Stravinsky can be as Griegish as he is here. Indeed this music might have been called *Hommage à Grieg*, so inevitably does it recall the Norwegian composer in his various characteristic pieces of "village music." Of course when you know who did compose the piece you can recognize the hand of the old Stravinsky here and there, especially in the third movement, but those who buy the disc expecting to hear something in the style of either *Le Sacre du Printemps* or of the classical *Oedipus Rex* or *Apollon Musagète* are due either for a disappointment or a fascinating surprise.

The *Norwegian Moods* were composed in Hollywood in 1942, and they are based on some Norwegian folk tunes. The composer makes no attempt to present this people's music in its native style, but simply uses it as the thematic material for some charmingly simple and introspective tone pictures. The four movements are called *Intrada*, *Song*, *Wedding Dance* and *Cortège*, and since they all fit on the two sides of a twelve-inch disc it goes without saying that each is short. This is good music to arouse the interest of a novice, but it will also be enjoyed by the musician. Stravinsky has dared to be neither profound nor complicated. His music is well played here under his own direction, and the recording does him justice. —P.L.M.

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Nutcracker Suite, Opus 71a*; played by the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York, direction of Artur Rodzinski. Columbia set M or MM-627, three discs, price \$3.85.

▲ In February 1940 Columbia issued a recording of this music by the late Frederick Stock and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (set 395) which was deservedly praised. Apparently Columbia thought well enough of that set to reissue it in September 1944 with a new cover design. Considering these facts, one wonders why a duplication of this work was deemed necessary at this time. There are so many more worthwhile things which need recording. Could the issuance this past year of the performance by Ormandy and the Philadelphia (Victor set 1020) have given Columbia the idea that another duplication was needed? It need not have done so, because the Ormandy set, although issued recently, was actually recorded in 1941. Ormandy's performance is a good one from many aspects, despite blemishes in the recording, but the conductor's clarification of line and detail often seems overly precise, and subsequent rehearsals of his reading have given me the impression of a ringmaster cracking his whip for precision of timing and effect. Rodzinski avoids this sort of thing; there is a volatility and lightness of touch in his performance that remind one of the old Goossens version (Victor set G-5—made in England around 1939).

The quality of the recording, as well as the fine solo playing, places this new version well in the forefront. There is a clarity of line and wide range of dynamics. The *pianissimo* marking at the opening of the Overture has never been as well handled previously; it creates an effect, however, that may mislead some listeners into believing the reproduction is lacking in fullness. A hearing of the full first side will quickly disperse this thought. It is the gradations of the dynamics, as well as the superb tonal realism, which gives this new set a place in the sun.

Mr. Rodzinski does not aim for any special effects in his performance, and there are no efforts to be fanciful or lush as in the Stokowski version. The conductor is gratifyingly straightforward, save for a few liberties in accelerations and retards which are permissible in music of this kind. The smooth recording should cause no trouble in reproduction on any machine. —P.H.R.

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Opus 64*; played by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, direction of Serge Koussevitzky. Victor set M or DM-1057, six discs, price \$6.85.

▲ There is a great deal to admire in this set: there is the beautiful quality of the Boston strings, the smooth, rich playing of the horns and the fine instrumental coloring—the often delicately differentiated shades and hues. As a recording, this set shows an advance over some issued by the same orchestra earlier this year—there is less hall reverberation in *fortissimi*. To a musician, however, this set will prove disappointing in more ways than one, for the strings are favored and much of the playing of the woodwinds in the background is practically inaudible. At the very end of side 1 and at the beginning of side 2, we have a mounting theme in the strings which the composer has interspersed with falling octaves in the woodwinds; these latter instruments are not heard here or when the passage is repeated later. Further, in the second movement, when the clarinet first comes in with the horn, it is barely audible. All of which may not bother the layman, but does annoy a musician and may annoy a music lover who is familiar with the work and its scoring, particularly when we consider that the performance is otherwise one of the best on records.

Koussevitzky's reading of this work has grown mellow with the years; there was, if memory serves me well, more dramatic intensity in his performances of ten or more years ago. There is brilliance and power in the performance, but it is the brilliance and power of the Boston Orchestra, which Koussevitzky has polished and developed into one of the greatest organizations of its kind in the world today. I miss in this performance the fresh enthusiasm for the music that one finds in the Beecham set, yet one can not say that this is not musical rendition of a high order. Nothing could have been more exquisitely fashioned than the waltz movement here, there is in it a refinement of expression, an evidence of good taste that is not always met with in the performance of Tchaikovsky.

For sheer virtuosity of orchestral playing, the finale shows this organization off as nothing else quite does on records. Koussevitzky adopts a more rapid tempo than most. The clarinet solo on side 11 is really breath-taking as we hear it here. I think this speed, while exciting from the standpoint of orchestral virtuosity, nonetheless dims the exultation of the music as it is felt in Beecham's performance. The English conductor, while adopting a fast pace, always

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keeps his melodies singing. It is always easy to disagree with anyone's interpretation, but one can not fail to admire Koussevitzky's musical workmanship; it is of a high order. And, any discerning music lover who knows Stokowski's lush and ostentatious treatment of this score will be impressed with the more fastidious musicianship of Dr. Koussevitzky. This new set is a definite rival to the famous Beecham one. But despite the fact that the Beecham is not as wide-ranged in its dynamics, I think the Englishman still reveals the freshest and most vital outlook on the music to be found on records. —P.H.R.

WEINBERGER: *Schwanda—Polka and Fugue*; played by the Philadelphia Orchestra, direction of Eugene Ormandy. Columbia disc 12372-D, price \$1.00.

▲Ormandy must have a particular fondness for this music. The external evidence is in the fact that he has now recorded it for the second time (his first essay dates back to his days with the Minneapolis Symphony, recorded by Victor) and the internal is to be sought in his manner of playing it. I suppose his Hungarian origin may account to some extent for his flare for music of this kind, which calls for both brilliance and vitality. In any case he has here made for us what would seem to me to be the definitive recording of the *Polka and Fugue*, satisfactory on every count.

Just why *Schwanda* was not more successful when it was done at the Metropolitan some years ago remains something of a mystery. There is a great deal more of delightful music in it than just these two familiar selections, and at the same time it is a good show. There is more good recording material to be found in it (remember the two selections once recorded for Polydor by the baritone Theodor Scheidl and for a time repressed here by Brunswick?) and perhaps another try at it on our stage might catch the public fancy. At any rate it is something to think about. —P.L.M.

Concerto

BACH: *Concerto No. 1 in D minor*; played by Eugene Istomin (piano) and the Busch

Chamber Players, conducted by Adolf Busch. Columbia set M or MM-624, three discs, price \$3.85.

▲We have already had a good performance of this work on the piano by Edwin Fischer and a chamber orchestra (Victor set 252) and a superb performance on the violin by Szigeti, with Fritz Stiedry and orchestra (Columbia set 418). In view of the fact that the present performance does not supersede the Fischer, except in matters of reproduction, it is a pity that Mr. Busch did not engage a harpsichordist rather than a pianist to play the solo part. For this would have given us a third view of the work, one which considering the style and taste of Busch's direction would have made the set much more welcome.

The young pianist, Mr. Istomin, a pupil of Rudolf Serkin, is a capable performer but hardly an imaginative one; his slow movement has little of the charm of Fischer's and none of the expressive warmth. He is heard at his best in the bright and sprightly final allegro. Mr. Istomin's tone is perhaps a little too crisp in the slow movement and there are points in his performance in the first movement where a greater variety of tone would have been welcome. Unquestionably, this young artist has a talent, as his performances in public have proved, and one admires his musicianship and digital skill in the present reading, but familiarity with the maturity of musical insight apparent in both Fischer's and Szigeti's versions leaves one missing a similar power of perception here.

Elsewhere in this issue, a contributor speaks of the Szigeti rendition of this work and his preference for it. It is a preference I share. Bach wrote this concerto originally for violin and later adapted it for the clavier. It is unfortunate that the original composition for the violin was lost, but the version used by Mr. Szigeti was deftly reconstructed from the piano transcription and commands our respect. Tovey has declared it to be "the greatest and most difficult violin concerto before the time of Beethoven". I can not imagine anyone who could have given us a finer performance of it than Szigeti.

There is little that Adolf Busch has done for the phonograph that is not worth investigating. He is an accomplished musi-

cian, if not tonally the best of violinists. His concerts with the Busch Chamber Players stand out in any season for their high quality. His direction here is especially admirable in the two quick movements, and the orchestral part of this performance is smoother and more alert than in the Fischer set. I prefer Fischer's manner of employing the piano part to that of Busch in the present set. Mr. Busch uses the piano in the tutti throughout and thus does not provide contrast between the strictly solo passages and the ensemble ones, while Fischer uses the piano only in the passages marked for the solo instrument. There does not seem to be much advantage in having the piano act in the capacity of the old clavier—which admittedly was the backbone of the 17th and 18th-century orchestras—for the piano is too percussive to blend with the strings in ensemble and when it emerges in the solo passages the intended contrast is weakened.

The recording of this work is admirably accomplished. —P.H.R.

Chamber Music

BENJAMIN: *Elegy, Waltz and Toccata* (four sides), and HARRIS: *Soliloquy and Dance*; (four sides); played by William Primrose (viola) with Vladimir Sokoloff at the piano in the former and Johana Harris in the latter. Victor set M or DM, price \$4.85.

▲ I wondered about the difference in Mr. Primrose's tonal quality in these two works, as others probably will, until I read the notes under the cover and learned he used two different violas. In the Benjamin, Mr. Primrose uses a modern instrument especially built for him to give "quality with power". There is a greater brilliance in the modern instrument which permits strength and bigness. In the Harris score, Mr. Primrose uses his famous old Amati viola, which was built in the 17th century. Here, there is a mellower tone, which one suspects conforms with the intentions of the composer, who has aimed at neo-classicism in his music.

I particularly like the quality of the modern instrument; it has a bite and the characteristic nasality which distinguishes

the viola from the violin and gives it its individuality. In Arthur Benjamin's work, which the composer tells us was written in 1942 and dominated by a "war feeling of intense emotion", this instrument with its greater tonal breadth and strength unquestionably serves both the composer and the artist best. The composition is based on four main themes which are skillfully manipulated throughout the three movements. The *Elegy* is the longest and most elaborate of the three sections, moving from a plaintive atmosphere into a climax of dramatic intensity. The *Waltz* belies its name and its conventional beginning, for it soon strikes out and builds dramatically. The *Toccata* is most revealing of the composer's craftsmanship but despite its thematic ingenuity it maintains its listener appeal.

The work by Roy Harris, the American composer, is one of his most accessible and appealing chamber compositions. The thematic material of the *Soliloquy* has a simple, heartfelt quality, which the composer has maintained practically throughout the move-

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ment. The *Dance* is more spontaneously conceived. Based on a gay lyrical theme, it develops its material with considerable skill. Although I can find no "jovial mood of infectious laughter" in this music, I do find rhythmic spontaneity and flow not always encountered in Harris' music. Moreover, the present score reflects a spiritual freedom which has seldom been as convincingly set forth in his larger works. It is almost as though Harris had developed a willingness to meet the ordinary music lover half-way.

Both composers are fortunate in having an artist of Primrose's calibre to perform these works for recording. A lesser artist would not have made either composition as interesting. The two pianists are both competent partners, matching the expressive moods of the violist with admirable understanding. Johana Harris is the wife of the composer.

The recording is excellent in every way.

—P.H.R.

PROKOFIEFF: *Sonata in D major, Opus 94*; played by Joseph Szigeti (violin) and Leonid Hambro (piano). Columbia set M or MM-620, three discs, price \$3.85.

▲ According to Israel Nestyev, this sonata was written originally for flute and piano in 1943 and arranged later for violin and piano. The American edition of the work, published by the Leeds Music Corporation, is for violin and piano, and is edited with special annotations by Joseph Szigeti. Mr. Szigeti first introduced the sonata in this country at a concert in Boston in November 1944. Since then he has played it on tour and the audience reception has been, according to the violinist, highly gratifying. I doubt that the composer could have had a more persuasive spokesman for this work than Mr. Szigeti; the violinist plays it superbly.

Mr. Nestyev writes rather amusingly of this work, considering it entirely from the standpoint of the flute. He says, in part: "The direct charm of the classic line, the original Russian Mozartism within a strictly modern concept, colored with Prokofieff irony—as in the *Sinfonietta* and the *Classical Symphony*—all this again appeared in the elegant and fragile piece for flute. The transparent 'white' color of the flute, used so often by Prokofiev to paint lyrical femi-

nine themes and images, suited perfectly the gentle, childlike lyricism of this sonata, with its rather toylike Scherzo, and the playful dancing finale."

I quote Nestyev to show how absurd the adoring biographer can become on occasion. The reader acquiring this set will find that very little of Nestyev's remarks applies to this work as performed here. Mr. Szigeti has told us that while the lyricism of this sonata make for more immediate receptivity on the part of the listener, Prokofieff has not refuted his ironic temperament, and his adept handling of "fanciful and expressive" figuration for the violin places the work among the best things he has written for the instrument.

With Prokofieff a given key signature is but a point of departure, and here he modulates from one tonality to another. That he ends up in the original key is beside the point; he could have arbitrarily ended in another key and left the average listener none the wiser. The Russian Mozartism which Nestev mentions can be dismissed at the beginning. Someone applied Mozart's name to the *Classical Symphony* and it seems to have been a convenient tag to add here. I agree with Donald Fuller, quoted in the notes and by Mr. Szigeti in a preface to the Leeds publication, that this sonata "is the finest abstract Prokofieff since the *Second Violin Concerto*". In many ways, I like it better than the concerto, despite the fact that it has shades of that work and *Peter and the Wolf* in it which suggest that Prokofieff aimed to keep it on a similar level of appeal to the listener. All four movements are ingeniously worked out; the thematic material itself is almost consistently lyrical, but Prokofieff is not content to leave it that way. His ironic bent supplies a strength which saves him from the saccharinity of Saint-Saëns, whose spirit hovers often in the background. The Scherzo is, for this reason, more effective than any the French composer has given us; it has pith and virility—and is far from "toylike". The slow movement could have been a simple folk-like song had the composer not supplied the interesting figuration in the violin part. And the finale is Prokofieff, the prankster, writing in his juiciest manner.

The work is a brilliant show-piece for Mr. Szigeti, for his accompanist, though com-

petent, does not emerge as an equal partner. Too, the recording, while excellently accomplished, favors the violinist just a shade more than I like.

Keyboard

SZYMANOWSKI: *Four Mazurkas, Op. 50, Nos. 1-4*; played by Artur Rubinstein (piano). Victor disc 11-9219, price \$1.00.

▲ Early in 1941 Columbia released a set of twelve Szymanowski etudes, played by Jakob Gimpel. On the last face he used as a filler the first two mazurkas of *Op. 50*. It is thus to be regretted that of all the mazurkas (Szymanowski wrote about twenty) Rubinstein had to choose two that previously have been recorded. Releases of the Pole's music do not come often enough to make such a repetition overly welcome.

It is, of course, interesting to note the differences between the interpretations. Gimpel's approach is suave, sensitive, somewhat percussive, while Rubinstein is the virtuoso always. I prefer Gimpel here. His rubato is delicately applied, and he gets more swing, more atmosphere than Rubinstein's robustness allows. Gimpel, perhaps, can afford to be more artistic, since he is not as much in the public eye as his colleague. Rubinstein, in this disc, does not let his public down. He stomps heroically through, is exciting, heroic, sturdy, and plays in the big style that he does so convincingly. All four, incidentally, are dedicated to the pianist, which gives him a proprietary right. But whether or not these mazurkas ask for such a treatment is another matter.

Szymanowski knew his Chopin but did not imitate. The tunes and rhythms are common to both, so there naturally would be a family resemblance anyway. In some of these mazurkas, such as the first and fourth, there is a curious feeling—a feeling that someone is playing Chopin with a few more sharps than there should be. What it amounts to is a twentieth century interpretation of Polish melodies, written by an individual and imaginative composer. We would like to hear more of them, recorded equally as well. —H.C.S.

Voice

BY REQUEST: *Show Boat: Make Believe* (Kern); *Swing Time: The Way You Look Tonight* (Kern); *The Hills of Home* (Fox); *All Day on the Prairie* (Arr. Guion); *Siboney* (Lecuona); *State Fair. It's a Grand Night for Singing* (Rodgers); sung by James Melton (tenor), with orchestra, direction of David Broekman; piano by Carroll Hollister. Victor set M-1060, three ten-inch discs, price \$3.25.

▲ Mr. Melton has at least two separate and distinct audiences, and in his various recorded recitals he has set himself to please one or the other of them. His intentions in this latest album are avowed to the subtitle, *A Program of Radio Favorites*. The selections are characteristic and for the most part very well known. The popular tenor's way with them will be anticipated by anyone familiar with his radio manner. To me the best thing in the set is Kern's appealing *The Way You Look Tonight*, which is done with quiet and dignified restraint, and which is enhanced by an effective and rather elaborate piano accompaniment, which gives a welcome touch of variety to the salon orchestra backgrounds. The other songs are in turn sentimental, nostalgic and carefree. The recording is very good indeed. —P.L.M.

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▲ Miss Sayao's distinctive achievement in this album lies in that she has elected to make up a program for the most part of thrice familiar and often recorded arias, and has done each of them well enough to keep the interest from centering too persistently on her own personality. It would be too much to say that these arias have not been done as well or better before, yet each of them is sung here with more than ordinary competence. Miss Sayao's voice is a small one, yet she manages in the huge reaches of the Metropolitan to make herself felt. In recording the volume of her singing has been built up, but the quality has not been distorted—there is no impression of unnaturalness. If in the recitative preceding the *Adieu* from *Manon* she has been allowed to cover the important and passionate orchestra a bit too much, the balance on the whole is very successful.

Perhaps the best thing in the set is the *Addio* from *Bohème*—a performance as satisfactory as any I have heard since my old first favorite of many years ago by Alma Gluck. And to set the bounds at once, it seems to me that she is least successful in the *Jewel Song*. Here the singing is a little careful, and I miss the lilt and the excitement which made Norena's recording so fine. If Sayao doesn't have the warmth of Muzio in *Ah, non credea* she still gives a pathetic and appealing performance. The *Je suis encore tout étourdie* has not been previously available domestically except on the Decca pressing of Ninon Vallin's disc, so that the inclusion of this selection has an especial value. Schumann is brighter and has a more striking vein of humor in the two *Nozze di Figaro* songs, but on the other hand her

Italian is by no means so good as Sayao's. The main point of this review is that whether you want primarily to hear Sayao or to include these particular airs in your collection, you will not go wrong on this set. —P.L.M.

FRIML: *Ma Bell* from *Three Musketeers*; and **SPANISH AIR:** *Juanita*; sung by Robert Merrill (baritone), with orchestra, direction of H. Leopold Spitalny. Victor 10-inch disc 10-1239, price 75c.

▲ Mr. Merrill is a regular feature of the Sunday afternoon radio programs these days, and this disc, like his last one, is undoubtedly intended for those who enjoy hearing him over the air. *Juanita* seems to me the best solo he has given us so far. The rather lush accompanying orchestra is more appropriately in the picture than it was in the other songs, and he seems to be more convinced by the song itself. One effect struck me as novel—his carrying over the refrain line *Nita, Juanita* without the long pause usually indulged in at this point. These songs will be sure to find a large public welcome, but it is to be hoped that the baritone will also give us something a little more substantial.

—P.L.M.

LEHAR: *The Merry Widow Waltz* and *Vilia*; sung by Eleanor Steber (soprano), with orchestra, direction of Jay Blackton. Victor disc 11-9218, price \$1.00.

▲ Miss Steber follows up her recent success with songs of Gershwin and Carmichael by giving us two selections from one of the most popular of light operas. And again the sheer loveliness of her voice and the simplicity of her approach to the music do much to impart something of novelty to the thrice-familiar music. She is happier, to be sure, in the *Vilia* than in the *Waltz*, because it is in the former song that her straightforward style counts for most. She makes no attempt to transform the *Waltz* into a brilliant concert piece in the manner of the antique Sembrich record, and it may be that her performance lacks just a spark to lend it distinction. Furthermore, her usually dependable intonation is not without a flaw in this number. Nevertheless the *Waltz* will give pleasure, and its shortcomings are more than made up for by the charm of the *Vilia*. The recording is excellent.

—P.L.M.

MAHLER: *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*; sung by Carol Brice, contralto, with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, direction of Fritz Reiner. Columbia set X or MX-267, two discs, price \$3.00.

▲ These *Songs of a Wayfarer* were composed in 1883, and like most of Mahler's music they are autobiographical. During his term as second conductor at the opera house in Kassel, the composer had been in love with one of the singers, Johanna Richter. The lady, however, had not consented to their union, and Mahler went his way. And so, to paraphrase Heine, out of his great griefs he made his little songs, and these remain to remind us of an incident which would otherwise have been long forgotten. Much of Mahler's music was set to folk poetry, and the simplicity of this type of verse always fits happily with his music. In this case, however, he wrote his own texts, keeping them generally very much in the folk style. His choice of the contralto voice for his interpreter (although he states in the score that the songs may also be sung by a baritone) is typical, and provides the happiest medium for his music. Although he was only twenty-three at the time of composition, the work already shows his mastery of the orchestra and his unique combination of richness and clarity—that counterpoint of tone qualities which is among his most striking characteristics.

Carol Brice, who sings the songs for us, has one of the richest and loveliest contralto voices I have heard in a long time. She has the wide range necessary for the songs, and she brings to them a warmth and understanding altogether beautiful. Perhaps her diction could be pointed up a trifle more, but it is far from poor. She and Mr. Reiner seem to be in complete sympathy, and the orchestra plays well. Given first-rate recording, this is very definitely an outstanding set. —P.L.M.

NEVIN: *The Rosary*; **BOND:** *A Perfect Day*; Sung by Thomas L. Thomas, baritone, with Gustave Haenschen and His All-String Orchestra and Chorus. Victor disc 11-9190, price \$1.00.

▲ I suppose we have to thank the radio and the de luxe movie houses for the tendency to

trick up fancy accompaniments such as these for so many recordings of what might otherwise be called simple songs. Personally I cannot help feeling that however one may react to these arrangements on first hearing, they do not bear well the repetition which is the strongest sales argument for recorded music. It may be that the public for these songs will like it best this way, but I am not convinced. Mr. Thomas for his part is pretty sure to prove satisfying. —P.L.M.

OPERETTA FAVORITES: *Sweethearts: Sweetheart Waltz; The Fortune Teller: Romany Life (Herbert); The Girl from Utah: They Didn't Believe Me; Roberta: Smoke Gets in Your Eyes (Kern); The Firefly: Donkey Serenade; The Firefly: Giannina Mia (Friml);* sung by Jeanette MacDonald (soprano), with Russ Case and his orchestra. Victor set M-1071, three 10-inch discs, price \$3.00.

▲ Jeanette MacDonald has long ranked as the most popular film *prima donna*, and it is

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quite as logical that she should record these particular light opera selections as that they should be recorded by her. There is unquestionably a large public for the songs as well as a large public for Miss MacDonald, and very definitely the twain do meet. I have no doubt the large majority will be pleased. The songs give the singer a good chance to show off the various facets of her art: there are some brilliant high notes and some showy passage-work, and some effectively quiet singing as well. The performances are typical and well recorded.

—P.L.M.

PORTER (arr. Alan Shulman): *Night and Day*; *Begin the Beguine*; *Ev'rything I Love*; *What Is this Thing Called Love*; *I've Got You under my Skin*; *In the Still of the Night*; sung by Risë Stevens (mezzo-soprano) with orchestra conducted by Sylvan Shulman. Columbia set M-630, three discs, price \$3.85.

▲ Miss Stevens has a talented arranger and a competent conductor. Her singing is smoothly contrived, but too studied for my liking. She seems over meticulous at times in her diction, and like Alan Jones she lacks the sophistication and the spontaneity which a Jane Froman brings to songs of this kind. Moreover, the Stevens' voice is not heard at its best, for she apes a style of crooning which her operatic training did not fit her for. One often wishes these days that genuinely talented singers like Miss Stevens would learn to stay in their own backyards. The recording is excellently done. —P.G.

RUSSIAN FAIR: *Russian Fair* (Arr. Shvedoff); *Two Guitars* (Arr. Shvedoff); *Monotonously Rings the Little Bell* (Arr. Jaroff); *In Praise of Raspberries* (Arr. Shvedoff); *Song of Stenka Rasin* (Arr. Dobrowen); *Snowstorms* (Arr. Jaroff); *Dark Eyes* (Arr. Shvedoff); sung by the Don Cossack Chorus, direction of Serge Jaroff. Columbia set M-619 four discs, price \$5.00.

▲ The Don Cossack Chorus might be called the Radio City of Russian male choirs, the

ne plus ultra of all the effects such organizations go in for. There are extremely deep basses and high falsettos, plenty of dynamics and all sorts of striking touches. All done in a precise and military manner, and in a military manner quite lacking in all real gaiety, humor or any particular relish. So far as I know the Don Cossacks have never fallen below the not inconsiderable standard they set for themselves long years ago, and there is no question that the sort of thing they do has a strong appeal to a great number of people. It is safe to say that the present set of records will please those people.

The *Russian Fair* which gives the album its name is a potpourri of Russian folksongs, done in the manner suggested by the title. The rest of the selections are of the folk or gypsy type. *Two Guitars* and *Dark Eyes* are the most familiar of them, and also, I suspect, the most modern in origin. *Stenka Rasin* is one of those wonderful Russian tunes which carry themselves for stanza after stanza even if you don't understand a word of it, and the other songs are of more or less the same kind. The recording is excellent. —P.L.M.

FOLK SONG: *Nightingale*; and LISTOV: *Song of the Tachanka* (Arr. A. Salama); sung by the General Platoff Don Cossack Chorus, direction of Nicholas Lostrukoff; M. Dedovitch, tenor solo. Victor disc 11-9220, price-\$1.00.

▲ My first surprise in this record was from the fact that this is not the familiar Alyabiev *Nightingale*, but a melody rather similar in line embellished to the *nth* degree. As here given it is mostly solo for an excellent tenor against a humming background. There is plenty of that melancholy so characteristic of the music of the Russians, and as usual this quality makes its strong appeal. The reverse of the disc is occupied by another familiar type of Slavonic song, the kind of spirited tune which men might sing while marching. In both the quality of the singing is very fine, and, as usual these days, the reproduction is altogether satisfactory.

—P.L.M.

WAGNER: *Die Walküre—Duet, Act 1, scene 3*; sung by Helen Traubel (soprano), and Emery Darcy (tenor), with the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York, direction of Artur Rodzinski. Columbia set M- or MM-618, three discs, price \$4.05.

▲ It would not be difficult to name the busiest soprano and conductor in the recording studios these days. This time Miss Traubel shares the honors with the young American tenor who has been unusually successful in some of the Wagner roles at the Metropolitan. It is easy to understand his success while we listen to these records, for despite his comparative inexperience he sings with authority and good style to match the work of his more celebrated colleague. The voice apparently is not an 'exceptionally big one, but it is adequate—it is hardly his fault if Miss Traubel seems in a place or two to have crowded him from the microphone. And if at the end of the scene he is completely overwhelmed by the orchestra, this is certainly the fault of the engineers. As for the soprano, she is more completely at home here than in her several most recent releases. Sieglinde is one of her very good roles. And I doubt if her voice has been better reproduced on any of her numerous recordings.

Of course parts of this music have been recorded many times. The scene opens with Sieglinde's re-entrance and the passage leading into her *Der Maenner Sippe*. Siegmund's famous *Liebeslied* (*Winterstürme wichen den Wonnemund*), Sieglinde's *Du bist der Lenz* and the exciting *Siegmund heiss ich* follow in due course. Several years ago Victor offered the complete act under the direction of Bruno Walter and with Lotte Lehmann, Melchior and List as the protagonists. This has always been considered an outstanding set, and I doubt if any of its owners will discard it in favor of the newer and less inclusive recording. Lehmann never had the power or the heroic style which distinguish Traubel, but she made up for this in a greater womanliness and warmth. Melchior is incomparable as Siegmund. But the virtues of this excellent new recording are sufficient to justify the perfect Wagnerite in having both versions in his collection.

—P.L.M.

In The Popular Vein

By Ewzo Archetti

Blowing Up a Storm (Herman); Woody Herman and his Orchestra, and *Fan It* (Jaxon); Woody Herman and his Woodchoppers. Columbia 37059.

● In everything except composition Herman is Ellington's nearest rival today; he has originality, imagination, and the ability to orchestrate effectively. *Blowin'* is not one of his best numbers, but it has something to recommend it—a good bounce, a good Herman clarinet chorus, excellent guitar solo. The trombone chorus, on the other hand, is definitely inferior, and the ending is not climactic but just plain noisy. . . . *Fan It* centers around Red Norvo, and he does very well by it. It is fast and hot, with a breathless, excited vocal by Woody, in keeping with the lyrics. Good performances by all except the trombonist, his is a weak spot.

Mabel! Mabel!; and *Linger in my Arms a Little Longer*; Woody Herman and his Orchestra. Columbia 36995.

● *Mabel! Mabel!* is Dvorak's *Humoresque* rigged out with a trick set of words, serving as an excuse for a series of hot choruses, outstanding among which are Woody's and Red Norvo's. Good jazz—not for dancing. No label credit to Dvorak, but he probably wouldn't want it. Reverse face is a typical sentimental ballad, with a dripping sax introduction and plenty of sax in the background all the way through. Vocal by Lynne Stevens is good. A hit for the juke-boxes!

And Then It's Heaven; and *I Guess I Expected too Much*; Harry James and his Orchestra. Columbia 37060.

● Slow, sentimental ballads which should be naturals for Frank Sinatra whom Buddy Di Vito, the vocalist, tries hard to imitate. Essentially vocal numbers with soft orchestral backgrounds, these songs still have enough of the James' trumpet to satisfy all but the most rabid James' fans.

Easy; and *Friar Rock*; Harry James and his Orchestra. Columbia 36996.

● In case you missed this one, in *Easy* both the arrangement and workmanship of James and his boys is unusually good. Though everybody does their best for the other side, it's overshadowed by *Easy*.

A Blue Serge Suit with a Belt in the Back; and *Afternoon Moon* (De Lange—Ellington); Cab Calloway and his Orchestra (vocals by Cab). Columbia 36993.

●The first is only fair Cab but with enough bounce for dancing in spite of too much vocal. The other is a slow, sentimental vocal spoiled by too much vocal, with Cab's voice trailing off in the end in a curious sort of fade-out. More of Johnny Hodges' sax would have sustained interest

Blue Skies (Berlin); and *I Don't Know Enough about You*; Benny Goodman and his Orchestra (vocals by Art Lund). Columbia 37053.

●A good dance disc, smoothly played, with some fine clarinet and trumpet work, and vocal. Not outstanding but good!

Chiquita Banana (Rhumba); and *South America, Take It Away*; Xavier Cugat and his Waldorf-Astoria Orchestra (vocals by Buddy Clark). Columbia 37051.

●A rhumba by Cugat is enough said. It's tops in spite of the fact that this number has been too often parodied to be taken seriously as a composition. The other side is a hit tune from the currently popular show, *Call Me Mister*. It is now being churned out on the radio by all sorts of combinations but Cugat takes it straight. Good dance disc, excellently recorded.

Chiquita Banana; and *You May Not Love Me*; Gene Krupa and his Orchestra (vocals by Carolyn Grey and Buddy Stewart). Columbia 37049.

●This *Banana* is typically Krupa—drums and all, hardly South American. The fact that it is labelled a rhumba-fox trot is, in a way, an apology. For the real thing one has to turn to Cugat. The other side leaves me cold.

Holiday for Strings; and *To Each his Own*; The Modernaires with Paula Kelly. Orchestra directed by Mitchell Ayres. Columbia 37063.

●Why anyone should have bothered to put words to a typical orchestral novelty like *Holiday for Strings* is beyond my comprehension unless they had the Modernaires in mind at the time. Their unique style can make almost anything sound good, but for my own part I wish they as well as everybody else had left this piece to the orchestra. . . . The other side is more legitimately in the Modernaires' line and they polish it off with relish.

The King Cole Trio—Album II. Capitol set BD-29, four discs, price \$2.50.

●Unfortunately this set arrived with every record broken. Not another copy could be found in any of our usual haunts. The scarcity of the album is perhaps an indirect compliment and recommendation. I was told the first copies went like hot cakes. Surely everyone knows the King Cole Trio style. From the

titles in the set and the evidence of past performances, this set should be worth investigating. It contains: *This Way Out*; *What Can I say after I Say I'm Sorry*; *I Know that You Know*; *I Don't Know Why*; *To a Wild Rose* (MacDowell); *I'm in the Mood for Love*; *I'm Through with Love*; *Look What You've Done to Me*.

You Call It Madness; and *Oh, But I Do* (Ella Fitzgerald); The King Cole Trio. Capitol 274.

●One of the best this trio has done. Both pieces are above average; the first has long been associated with the group. The second has a good bounce

Somewhere in the Night; and *One Love*; Frank Sinatra with Orchestra, directed by Axel Stordahl. Columbia 37054.

Five Minutes More; and *How Cute You Can Be*; Frank Sinatra etc. Columbia 37048.

●Sung by Sinatra—period! Typical Sinatra recordings, the numbers fit him like a glove. This is not intended to be disparaging, for in this particular groove these belong they are good.

Two Silhouettes; and *That Little Dream Got Nowhere*; Dinah Shore with Orchestra, conducted by Meredith Wilson. Columbia 37050.

●*Two Silhouettes* was one of those charming little episodes that somehow got lost among the more pretentious and more publicized episodes in Disney's picture, *Make Mine Music*. In the film, the scene was centered around Dinah Shore's singing and this record is a very faithful reproduction of that scene. . . . The other side is typical Shore fare—orchestration and all. Very nicely and very smoothly done.

Recommended for Dancing

Who Do You Love I Hope from *Annie Get your Gun* (vocal—Rosalind Patton); and *I Know* (vocal—Jack Hunter); Elliott Lawrence and his orchestra. Columbia 37047.

Cynthia's In Love; and *I'd Be Lost without You*; Frankie Carle and his orchestra. Columbia 36994.

Smiles (vocal—A Pair of Pairs); and *Night and Day*; Claude Thornhill and his orchestra. Columbia 37055.

You Make Me Feel so Young; and *Somewhere in the Night* (both from *Three Little Girls in Blue*); Martha Tilton with Paul Weston and his Orchestra. Capitol 272.

This Is Always (vocal by Buddy Di Vito); and *I've Never Forgotten* (vocal by Ginnie Powell). Harry James and his Orchestra. Columbia 37055.

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